* Skill upgradation programmes, in collaboration with State Governments and other industry bodies, to enable overseas Indian workers seek better employment opportunities and to help them move up the wage chain is an important initiative being undertaken by the Ministry.

* To ensure protection and welfare of Indian workers abroad, a proposal to comprehensively amend the Emigration Act, 1983 is already underway.

* Overseas Citizenship of India (OCI) Scheme was launched in January, 2006. As of 18th August, 48,326 persons of Indian origin have been issued with OCI documents.

* Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Ministry and Association of American Physicians of Indian (AAPI) Origin to implement Pilot Project in basic healthcare in the States of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar.

* A universal integrated electronic remittance facility was launched by the Ministry in association with UTI Bank. The remittance facility is currently operational between Doha and India and is likely to be extended to the entire Gulf region during this financial year.

* The Ministry organised a National Consultation on marriages with overseas Indians in Delhi in February, 2006 to address the problems relating to marriages with overseas Indians.

* The Ministry is bringing out guidance booklets for the benefit of overseas Indians containing information on policies of Government of India in various matters including investment opportunities in India, a guidance booklet on marriages to overseas Indians and a booklet on emigration.

* A Gender Advisory Group has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Secretary, MOIA comprising of members from women organisations, State Governments, NGOs, etc., to address problems relating to marriages with overseas Indians, among other things.

Rural Business Hubs

†2960. MISS ANUSUIYA UIKEY: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Rural Business Hubs are being set up to connect the corporate sector with the rural sector;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(b) if so, the names of the States where they would be launched; and

(c) the names of the companies which would be included in the Rural Business hub alongwith details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) Yes, Sir. As part of the efforts to take the benefits of economic reforms to the rural areas of the country and all sections of the society, the Ministry of Panchayati Raj has launched the Rural Business Hubs (RBHs) initiative which will connect the rural sector with the corporate sector and thereby widen the market for rural products.

(b) The concept is being implemented in all States and Union Territories of the country.

(c) Rural products which have got wide market potential are being identified by the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs), State Governments, Central Ministries, NABARD, Khadi and Village Industries Commission, Confederation of Indian Industries (CIL) etc., and any company interested to associate with PRIs for setting up RBHs are free to enter into Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) with them and set up RBHs. The Ministry of Panchayati Raj facilitates this process.

Rural Business Hubs

2961. SHRI SYED AZEEZ PASHA: Will the Minister of PANCHAYATI RAJ be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government are expecting to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with multinational companies based in India and abroad for the development of rural India by setting up rural business hubs; and

(b) if so, the details of the proposal and stage at which the proposal is at present?

THE MINISTER OF PANCHAYATI RAJ (SHRI MANI SHANKAR AIYAR): (a) and (b) The Government is not contemplating to sign any Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with multinational companies based in India and abroad for the development of rural India by setting up Rural Business Hubs (RBHs).

The Union Government, with the help of State Governments, Panchayats, the Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and other similar organisations is implementing the concept of RBH to connect rural producers and rural